



NIGERIA

Quick Facts

Population: 219,463,862 (July 2021 est.)

Area: 923,768 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Hausa 30%, Yoruba 15.5%, Igbo (Ibo) 15.2%, Fulani 6%, Tiv 2.4%, Kanuri/Beriberi 2.4%, Ibibio 1.8%, Ijaw/Izon 1.8%, other 24.7% (2018 est.) note: Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, is composed of more than 250 ethnic groups

GDP (official exchange rate): \$475.062 billion (2019 est.)

Source: CIA World FactBook (Last Updated June 2021)

INTRODUCTION

Since its independence in 1960, Nigeria has been plagued by a number of organized militant groups. Among them are Niger Delta militants in southeastern Nigeria, whose grievances have been based on extreme environmental degradation, as well as political and economic disenfranchisement, although these groups have been pacified through government amnesty programs in recent years. Additionally, there are ethnic-based militants in Nigeria's Middle Belt, where the predominantly Muslim northern region and predominantly Christian southern region meet. There are also often conflicts among ethnic groups of different religions over land use. In recent years, Muslim Fulani herders moving southward from northern Nigeria and even Niger have increasingly armed themselves and clashed with Christian villagers in unprecedented numbers, albeit without any centralized coordination. Finally, there are Islamist militants in northern Nigeria, such as the extremely violent Boko Haram and the potentially militant, pro-Iranian, Shi'ite Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN), which has become embattled after a series of crackdowns by the central government in Abuja. These two groups seek to establish Islamic governance in Nigeria (for Boko Haram, a Sunni-Salafi state, and for the IMN a Khomeinist Shi'a one), to institutionalize Islamic law and an Islamic identity for the country, to pry Nigeria out of its alliances with Western countries, and to reorient it toward the Islamic world.

Since September 2010, Boko Haram has become the greatest threat to Nigeria's unity, and is responsible for more violence than any other militant movement in the country. More than 30,000 people have been killed to date in Boko Haram-related violence, but that number may be a low estimate given that many deaths go unreported. Millions more have been displaced and need food assistance due to Boko Haram's disruption of the local economy and destruction of villagers.¹ Notably, however, Boko Haram is divided internally between two factions. One is loyal to, and recognized as an affiliate by, the Islamic State. It is known as the Islamic State's West Africa Province, or ISWAP, and has recently become more lenient toward the local population in order to better win "hearts and minds."² The other faction is Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (The Group for Preaching the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad, or JAS), which is

loyal to Islamic State caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi but is not recognized by the Islamic State as one of its affiliates. It remains exceedingly violent and harsh toward civilians. Both factions are referred to as “Boko Haram” by the media and government, although neither group refers to itself as such. A third faction, Ansar al-Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan (Vanguards for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa, or “Ansaru”) also exists, but it only reemerged from dormancy in 2020 after five years of little activity.

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

In addition to ISWAP, JAS, and Ansaru, which are northern Nigeria’s most violent Salafist-*jihadi* groups, there are hundreds of other Islamist groups in Nigeria, including millenarian *mahdists*. The numbers of those actors, however, have declined in recent decades due to proselytization by Salafists and Shi’a militants. There are also many religiously moderate, albeit socially conservative, Sufi groups of the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya orders, as well as Jama’atu Nasril Islam (JNI), a northern Nigerian Muslim umbrella organization led by the Sultan of Sokoto. In contrast to violent Islamist leaders, JNI has called on Muslims to “pray fervently for peaceful co-existence in Nigeria and for Allah to put to shame those who are bent on chaos and unrest.”³ The former emir of Kano has similarly attempted to dampen Islamist rhetoric by promoting coexistence with Christians, including accepting them as “indigenes” in a historically Muslim city like Kano.⁴

Nigerian universities have long served as hotbeds of Islamist activity, especially by the Lagos-founded Muslims Students Society, whose branches are found at various Nigerian universities.⁵ Most activists at the forefront of Islamic extremism in northern Nigeria have their roots in the universities, where they have been able to spread radical ideas and use academic platforms to influence students. Two noteworthy trends in Nigeria, which are consistent with the rest of the Islamic world, are that youth are the primary demographic group susceptible to radicalization, and that men gravitate toward radicalization more than do women.

This section describes four of the most prominent Islamist groups in northern Nigeria: JAS and ISWAP (both commonly referred to as “Boko Haram” in media and government discourse); Maitatsine/Kala Kato; Jama’at Izalat al Bid’a Wa Iqamat as Sunna (Izala); and the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN).

JAS and ISWAP (Boko Haram)

JAS traces its lineage to Mohammed Yusuf, a Nigerian preacher who maintained his headquarters in northeastern Nigeria’s Borno State. Yusuf primarily taught that Western education and influence were impermissible in Islam because they contradicted the Quran, and that service in the Nigerian government was unacceptable since Nigeria was not an Islamic State. Various Saudi clerics and Salafi-*jihadi* ideologues and groups, including the Taliban, were influential on Yusuf’s worldview, and prompted his adoption of a strain of Salafi-*jihadi* ideology that, in his own words, emulated that of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, although Yusuf did not explicitly cite al-Maqdisi and other major al-Qaeda ideologues, such as Abu Basir al-Tartusi, in his sermons.⁶ As Yusuf gained in popularity in the late 2000s, his teachings began to generate opposition from mainstream Salafists who had previously mentored him; one such scholar argued that if Muslims follow Yusuf’s advice, then “pagan policemen [who serve in government] will kill and injure Muslims, and when taken to hospitals pagan doctors and nurses [with Western education] will attend to them.”⁷

However, although Yusuf began urging his followers (who numbered in the thousands and hailed from Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon) to prepare for conflict with the Nigerian government, he did not necessarily start out as a *jihadi* – or, at least, he seemed to have a long-term project for *jihadi*, which meant he initially did not appear to be a *jihadi* to outsiders.⁸ During his leadership of the organization (2002 to 2009), Yusuf’s followers did not engage in coordinated violence against the state, although occasional clashes with Nigerian security forces did occur. According to Yusuf’s son, he once explained that his

“*dawa* [preaching] was for *jihad*, and all who have thought it is *dawa*, or education, or teaching, or a call without identity ... have not understood the *dawa*. It is *dawa* and a *jihadi* movement, a fighting group, and not only a group for *dawa*.”⁹

Yusuf was killed along with several hundred of his followers in a four-day series of clashes with the Nigerian government in northeastern Nigeria in July 2009. Afterward, Yusuf’s deputy, Abubakar Shekau, and other followers announced a *jihad* against the Nigerian government and security forces, Christians, and assorted moderate Muslim religious and political figures. This was the first time the group claimed a formal name: JAS. Its first attack took place on September 7, 2010, when approximately 50 fighters attacked Bauchi Prison and freed fellow members who had been detained in the July 2009 clashes, making good on the organization’s promise that these prisoners would not spend the holiday of Eid al-Fitr behind bars. Since then, JAS has carried out thousands of attacks and killed in excess of 20,000 people. Its area of operations initially ranged from its hub of operations in northeastern Borno State to Kogi State in the geographic south of Nigeria, to Sokoto in northwestern Nigeria. However, since 2013, due to a security crackdown as well as grassroots opposition from local populations, JAS has concentrated predominantly in southern Borno and along the Nigerian-Cameroonian borderlands, while ISWAP has dominated the Nigerian-Niger borderlands and the region around Lake Chad.¹⁰ Only in 2019 did the weaker JAS establish cells around Lake Chad, which have begun to contest ISWAP for predominance in that area.¹¹

At a minimum, JAS’s main objectives are to strip religious authority from traditional Muslim leaders and place it in the hands of JAS’s religious leaders, and to create an Islamic state in some or all of Nigeria. After 2009, some members might have accepted prosecution of the security officers who killed Mohammed Yusuf, amnesty for all JAS members in prison, and compensation for mosques and homes destroyed in clashes with the government, as grounds for a cessation of conflict. However, too much time has passed since then for such measures to resonate among the group’s members, who now will settle for nothing less than an Islamic state. JAS mostly carries out sharia punishments, and holds hundreds of captives, including a reported 700 women.¹² In addition, while many JAS members remain in prison, some hostage exchanges, including for 23 and 82 Chibok schoolgirls in late 2016 and early 2017, respectively, have led to the release of several key JAS members.¹³

Despite some of JAS’s successes, its killings of innocent Muslims during attacks on the government and security forces—both as collateral damage and as a means to intimidate the broader population—has bred dissent among the movement’s members. In January 2012, the more internationally oriented faction of the group, which called itself Jama’atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan (Vanguards for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa, or “Ansaru”), announced its formation in a video statement and in fliers distributed in Kano.¹⁴ This occurred after Boko Haram’s January 20, 2012 attacks left more than 170 civilians dead.¹⁵ Ansaru has since been proscribed as a terrorist group by the United Kingdom for its alleged involvement in the kidnapping and killing of two British and Italian men in Sokoto State in March 2012, and for being “broadly aligned” with al-Qaeda.¹⁶ Ansaru began raising its online media profile in November 2012, around the same time that its fighters carried out a prison break in Abuja.¹⁷ In December 2012 Ansaru kidnapped a Frenchman in Katsina, 30 miles from the border with Niger, and warned France that the prisoner’s fate would be contingent on France rescinding the law banning the Islamic veil and ceasing its planned attack on the Islamic state in northern Mali (the Frenchman later escaped captivity).¹⁸ In January 2013, Ansaru also kidnapped seven foreigners in Bauchi State. The hostages were subsequently killed after the group alleged that the UK and Nigeria were preparing to conduct a rescue attempt, as one of the seven captives was British.¹⁹ Furthermore, Ansaru jointly claimed a kidnapping with the larger JAS in December 2013 of a French priest in Cameroon, who was later released for a multi-million dollar sum of money as well as the release of JAS militants imprisoned in Cameroon.²⁰

By 2014, however, Ansaru was virtually defunct operationally, although it continued to issue statements. Despite initially offering itself as a more “humane” alternative to JAS, three factors led to its

demise: the French-led intervention in northern Mali in 2012-13, which separated Ansaru from its AQIM patrons; the arrests of key members by Nigerian special forces, including those who had received funding from AQIM; and JAS's assassinations of Ansaru commanders who had defected from JAS. Some Ansaru members (partly out of desperation) rejoined JAS and brought with them skills in kidnapping and media manipulation, especially in the Lake Chad region. Nevertheless, in January 2020 Ansaru proved it still was a threat when it ambushed an emir's convoy in Kaduna State, although it seems Ansaru was biding time before formally its presence once more.²¹

After Shekau pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State in March 2015, JAS officially became known as the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP). However, the move prompted Nigeria, under new president Muhammadu Buhari, to launch a large-scale military offensive against ISWAP, causing the group to lose control of much of the territory in northeastern Nigeria that JAS had previously controlled.²² These battlefield reversals, as well as lingering ideological disputes between Shekau and former Ansaru members as well as some of his own former loyalists over tactics, ultimately led to a fracturing of ISWAP. Under the leadership of Muhammed Yusuf's son, Abu Musab al-Barnawi, a large contingent of fighters left Shekau's camp and successfully appealed to the Islamic State to recognize their faction, which it did in August 2016.²³ Shekau, meanwhile, was compelled to leave ISWAP with a relatively small contingent of his loyalist fighters, and subsequently announced in August 2016 that he was reverting to the name JAS.²⁴

Both ISWAP and JAS remain active today, with the former fielding around 4,000 fighters and largely operating in scattered territory in the Lake Chad region, while the latter's force around 2,000 fighters is scattered in disparate territories in Borno State. For the most part, the groups remain at odds. While some militants in JAS have reportedly offered to negotiate with the Nigerian government, JAS and ISWAP remain responsible for almost all of the Islamist violence in northern Nigeria, and as a result any truce with other factions would be inconsequential and difficult to envision.²⁵

In May of 2021, Shekau's death was confirmed by multiple news sources, although reports regarding his cause of death have varied. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the militant leader died by detonating a suicide vest in order to escape capture by the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) fighters.²⁶ Analysts have suggested that Shekau's death could usher in a period of instability within the broader Boko Haram movement, as ISWAP hunts down any rival faction leader in order to consolidate its control.²⁷

Maitatsine/Kala Kato

Kala Kato, which means "mere man," in reference to the Prophet, is an offshoot of the Maitatsine sect of the 1980s led by the Cameroonian Mohammed Marwa.²⁸ Marwa claimed to be a new Prophet of Islam and was known as the "Maitatsine," meaning "the one who damns." More eccentric than Boko Haram founder Mohammed Yusuf, Marwa condemned anyone who read any book other than the Quran or used products which reflected Western life, such as watches, cars, bicycles, televisions, buttons, or cigarettes. An antecedent not only to Kala Kato but also to Boko Haram, Marwa and his thousands of followers clashed with Nigerian authorities in a battle in Kano in 1980 in which Marwa was killed. Subsequent battles to suppress his followers took place in Borno State in 1982; in Gongola State (present-day Gombe State) in 1984; and in Bauchi State in 1985. In December 2009, Kala Kato engaged in a series of riots and clashes with Nigerian security forces in Bauchi State, resulting in the death of 70 people, including soldiers, policemen, women and 15 children.²⁹ The cause of the clashes was Kala Kato's violation of an ordinance against preaching outdoors, which was imposed following the Boko Haram clashes of July 2009.³⁰

Kala Kato remains one of the most obscure Islamist groups in northern Nigeria. Its leader, Mallam Salisu, maintains that it "has no link with the Boko Haram followers."³¹ It is also a small group of approximately 2,000 members, and likely will not hold out appeal to future generations of Islamists or *jihadists*, who will be inclined to see Boko Haram as a more "legitimate" option because of the recognition it has received

from the Islamic State and its greater adherence to general Salaf-*jihadi* ideology. Nonetheless, Kala Kato and similar groups can be placed on a spectrum of heterodox forms of Islamic extremism that, for the time being, pose little threat of violence directed against the state, Muslims who disagree with them, or Christians.

Jama't Izalat al Bid'a Wa Iqamat as Sunna (Society of Eradication of Innovation and Implementation of the Sunna, or Izala)

The *Izala* movement in Nigeria is an anti-Sufi Salafist movement that opposes *bid'a* (innovation) and seeks a literal interpretation of the Quran. It was established with funding from Saudi Arabia in the late 1970s, in part as an effort to quell then growing pro-Khomeinist leanings among northern Nigerian Muslims and also to oppose Sufism. Many *Izala* clerics have lamented the “Westernization” of Nigerian society, albeit while accepting modern technology and sciences and embracing women’s education and financial self-sufficiency. With many institutions all over the country and influence at the local, state and even federal levels, *Izala* has become one of the largest Islamist societies not only in Nigeria, but also in the neighboring countries of Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. The implementation of *sharia* law in twelve northern states since 2000 legitimized the *Izala* movement, which claims to have been the “vanguard” of the pro-*sharia* movement.³² Even Ja’far Mahmud Adam (one of the most prominent *Izala* leaders in northern Nigeria) reduced his role in 2005, claiming that *sharia* was not properly implemented.³³ Nevertheless, *Izala* clerics’ participation in democracy and friendly relations with Nigerian and even Western political leaders has led to Boko Haram labeling them as hypocrites and even assassinating Adam in 2007, which was a precursor to the *jihad* that was launched in 2010.³⁴

Today, *Izala*’s important contribution to the Nigerian Islamist landscape is that it presents a credible and non-violent option for Islamists even though in the early 2000s some *Izala* leaders had mentored Boko Haram leaders.³⁵ Nonetheless, the rising anti-Shi’a sentiment in Nigeria, coupled with broader anti-Iranian sentiment in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East, has positioned *Izala* also as a leading anti-Shi’a group in Nigeria.³⁶ Consequently, new members might embrace its new anti-Shi’a activism.

Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN)

The IMN is distinct from other Islamist groups in Nigeria because it historically received inspiration and backing from the Islamic Republic of Iran, whereas most other groups (like *Izala*) are supported by Saudi Arabia and other wealthy Sunni Muslim sponsors. The leader of the IMN, Shaykh Ibrahim el-Zakzaky, has alleged that the IMN is only an “Islamic Movement,” rather than either “Shi’a” or “fundamentalist”; however, the common, and correct, perception of the IMN in Nigeria is that it is in fact a Shi’a movement.³⁷ Although the IMN’s members are mostly Shi’a, the IMN resembles *Izala* and Boko Haram in that it believes secular authorities should not hold power and that an Islamic state is the solution for problems in northern Nigerian society.³⁸

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Ibrahim el-Zakzaky and his followers sought to bring about an Islamic revolution similar to the 1979 Iranian revolution. When *sharia* law was instituted in twelve states of northern Nigeria in 2000, el-Zakzaky believed there was an over-emphasis on corporal punishments; that the northern governors were illegitimate since they did not come to power through Islamic parties; that the governors were dishonest people “who amputate the hands of poor people, who steal peanuts, while those who steal millions of tax-payers’ money go scot-free”; and that anything short of Iran-style Islamic Revolution would be a failure.³⁹ Since 2001, the IMN has committed itself to involvement “in national or international issues that are of concern to Muslims, as well as in solidarity with oppressed sections of the Muslim Ummah such as the Palestinians and Iraqis.” In 2012, el-Zakzaky said a U.S. or Israeli attack on Iran would impact not only Nigeria but the entire world.⁴⁰

After years of steady growth in terms of followers, particularly around el-Zakzaky’s base in Zaria, Kaduna State, the ranks of the group were thinned when the Nigerian army killed 300 IMN members

during a violent crackdown in December 2015.⁴¹ El-Zakaky himself was reportedly heavily wounded during the fighting and taken to a military hospital in Lagos.⁴² The repression of IMN and el-Zakzaky, which has continued since 2015, has drawn criticism from international human rights watchdogs.⁴³ The Nigerian army—possibly with support from anti-Iran elements in the Arab World—has justified action against the IMN because el-Zakzaky had created a quasi-state in parts of Zaria, with its own police, media, and schools reminiscent of and arguably modeled after Hezbollah in Lebanon. Although unproven, there are also rumors that Saudi Arabia encouraged the elimination of el-Zakzaky in an effort to blunt Iranian influence in Nigeria.⁴⁴ Ultimately, in August 2019, a court ruled that al-Zakzaky must be allowed to leave detention to receive medical treatment, and there were rumors he might seek refuge in exile in Iran.⁴⁵

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

Nigeria's 190 million citizens are divided almost evenly between Muslims and Christians, with Muslims forming the majority of the population in the northern half of the country and Christians forming the majority in its southern half. With more than 90 million Christians and a roughly equal number of Muslims, Nigeria is both the most populous Christian country in Africa and the most populous Muslim one. The Hausa and Fulani (often referred to as the "Hausa-Fulani" because of their close cultural interaction for the past several centuries) constitute the largest single Muslim ethnic group in Nigeria, and about one-fourth of its total population. The Muslim Kanuri ethnic group predominates in Yobe and Borno States and is about 4% of Nigeria's total population. The Yorubas of southwest Nigeria are about 60% Christian, and one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria along with the Hausa-Fulanis and the Igbos of southeast Nigeria. At an estimated 15 million, Yoruba Muslims are second only to the Hausa-Fulanis in terms of total population in an ethnic group. There are also dozens of other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups in Nigeria, including the Shuwa Arabs of Borno State, who trace their lineage to the Arab tribes who migrated into northeastern Nigeria from the Sudan centuries ago.

Most Muslims in Nigeria are Sunni Muslims. However, about five percent of Nigeria's Muslims are Shi'a, and they can be found throughout northern Nigeria, particularly in Zaria, Kaduna State but also in large numbers in Sokoto, Kano and Yobe and southern Nigeria. The number of Shi'a Muslims in the country has increased since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which brought an Islamic government to power in Iran. Ibrahim el-Zakzaky has served as the leader of Nigeria's Shi'a (via the IMN) with support – primarily ideological – from Iran, although factions have broken from al-Zakzaky and received support from Iran.⁴⁶ The rise of Shiism in Nigeria has led to a rivalry with the majority Sunni part of the Muslim population, and there Sunni-Shi'a clashes have been reported.⁴⁷ Iran's support of Shiism in Nigeria and West Africa more broadly suggests Shiism is likely to grow in future decades.⁴⁸

Conflict is most frequent between Muslims and Christians, as each group competes for a greater share of political and economic power in Nigeria. Election season in the country has tended to generate the most tensions. Muslims, for example, believed that, since they often claim to constitute more than 70% of Nigeria's population, the 2011 victory of the Christian presidential candidate Goodluck Jonathan over Muslim candidate Muhammadu Buhari (by 58% to 32% of the vote) was likely fraudulent. Anger over this issue contributed to an increasing sense of marginalization among Nigerian Muslims, which has since been alleviated by Buhari's victory in the presidential elections in 2015 and 2019, and a smooth transfer of power. But Boko Haram has tended to exploit this tension by staging dozens of attacks on churches and Christians in northern Nigeria. Most recently, Muslim-Christian violence has emerged in the context of Muslim Fulani herdsmen, who are now armed with machine guns (as opposed to the clubs they traditionally carried), raiding farmlands owned by Christian Nigerians and sometimes killing them. This has, in turn, led to reprisals.⁴⁹

Overpopulation contributes to religious tensions as Muslim groups from northern Nigeria migrate into

Christian areas in the Middle Belt, prompting competition over land use and new member proselytization. The Sultan of Sokoto, who also leads the *Jama'atu Nasril Islam* (JNI), has said that “The rise of secularism and the increasing activities of western evangelical organizations have made it all the more urgent that the message of Islam shall be heard loud and clear and the JNI must play a leading role in this endeavor.”⁵⁰

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

Section 101 of the Nigerian constitution states that “The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion.” In practice, however, religion plays such a large role in the state that Nigeria cannot be considered not truly secular.⁵¹

Islam impacts the governmental sphere in several ways. The country observes Islamic holidays such as Eid el-Fitr, Eid al-Adha and Milad al-Nabi. Nigeria’s government is involved in organizing the *Hajj* pilgrimage. Islamic slogans in the Arabic language are featured on the country’s currency and army insignias. Islamic sermons are delivered in public places throughout the country. Most significant of all, twelve states in northern Nigeria have implemented *sharia* law since 2000.

This controversial step is inextricably linked to politics. Many northern governors seem to support *sharia* out of religious devotion, but also because of a desire to gain political advantage and shore up their support from mainstream Muslims by appealing to the religious sentiments of those people. Through at least a veneer of dedication to Islam, these politicians attempt to win the support of the masses and stifle criticism or, in many cases, investigations into their corrupt behavior. Some religious scholars have argued that the traditional rulers, including the sultans and emirs who have no formal authority but serve as political advisers and maintain influence through their social status, are opposed to *sharia* law because certain interpretations (especially Salafism) do not permit hereditary succession.⁵² *Izala*, the IMN, and Boko Haram all believe that the Sultan and other traditional rulers are apostates for accepting a version of “half-sharia” in which secular institutions like elections and democracy exist side by side with Islam.

Although Islam is not formally a state institution in Nigeria, Muslims organizations play an important role in the country. With the advent of *sharia* law in twelve northern states starting between 1999 and 2001,⁵³ these groups have begun to challenge the secular nature of the country, although the struggle over implementing *sharia* has dampened the desire to completely replace the secular system for an Islamic one. Boko Haram, meanwhile, seeks to overthrow both the secular and the traditional Muslim establishment in Nigeria and create an Islamic state akin to the “caliphate” established by the Islamic State terrorist group in Iraq and Syria. In recent years, Boko Haram has achieved success in controlling territory in Borno State and removing the Nigerian government’s presence altogether from certain areas. Although it is not likely to achieve this goal throughout Nigeria, Islamist insurgent groups are nonetheless gaining more traction in West Africa – suggesting that the secular nature of the Nigerian state will continue to face a challenge from regional Islamist forces. That, in turn, may erode support among Nigerian Muslims for secular national authorities. The saving grace for Nigeria may, paradoxically, be Boko Haram’s violence, which has turned much of the Muslim citizenry away from *jihadism* compared to the period after 9/11.

One of the challenges in countering Boko Haram has been the government’s consistent (and inaccurate) claims to have defeated the insurgency.⁵⁴ Moreover, the Nigerian government has been slow to report to families the status of fallen soldiers, which has led to demoralization in the army, especially when families learn about the fate of their loved ones through online Boko Haram propaganda videos.⁵⁵ The army has proven capable of securing Maiduguri, Borno’s capital, and rural towns. However, the countryside is too vast for the army to patrol and soldiers come from throughout Nigeria and do not necessarily know local languages as well as Boko Haram fighters. This benefits to the insurgents, which can easily hide among the population.

In this fight, the Nigerian army has an obvious advantage in terms of weapons and materiel. However,

it has also lost significant quantities of weaponry to Boko Haram⁵⁶ as a result of numerous successful Boko Haram ambushes and, in the case of ISWAP, growing capabilities imparted by the training of its members in places like Libya.⁵⁷

The counterinsurgency has been characterized by excessive confidence by the army, an inability to outmaneuver the *jihadists* in the countryside (especially in Borno) and the lack of clear strategy to win beyond simply counting numbers of dead Boko Haram militants. At the same time, corruption in the military has led to accusations of wasted resources and poorly constructed bases. If the Nigerian army does not succeed in turning the situation around, there are now legitimate fears that parts of Borno will, in the long term, de facto secede from the larger state.

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